United Nations E/AC.51/2002/2

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
21 May 2002

Original: English

Committee for Programme and Coordination
Forty-second session
10 June-5 July 2002
Agenda item 3 of the provisional agenda*
Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations

Efficient and effective measures for management improvement**

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report has been prepared in response to section II of General Assembly resolution 56/253 of 24 December 2001, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report on management improvement measures. The report provides an overview of initiatives both within the United Nations itself and across the organizations of the common system. It also focuses on two mechanisms for sharing of knowledge and experience, one in the Department of Management of the United Nations Secretariat and the other through the secretariat of the High Level Committee on Management (HLCM) web site. A strategy for expanding cooperation in management improvement measures is outlined.

* E/AC.51/2002/1.
** The submission of the present document was delayed due to the need to consult extensively with the entities of the United Nations common system.

02-39397 (E) 030602

Contents

		Paragraphs	*Page*
	Introduction	1–3	3
I.	Management improvement measures in the United Nations common system	4–20	3
II.	Efforts for cooperation, learning and sharing of experience within the United Nations common system	21–32	10
III.	A strategy for cooperation and coordination in management improvement measures	33–39	13
IV.	Conclusion	40–41	14

Introduction

1. The General Assembly, in section II of its resolution 56/253 of 24 December 2001, inter alia, noted the importance of adopting efficient and effective management practices within the United Nations system, in particular by promoting cooperation, learning and comparison of experience between United Nations duty stations, so that optimal practices are widely adopted, as appropriate. It requested the Secretary-General to pursue the necessary management improvement measures and to report thereon to the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its forty-second session. The present report has been prepared in response to the request of the General Assembly.

2. Over the past decade, the organizations of the United Nations common system, without exception, have undertaken significant management improvement initiatives. These measures have been prompted by a common recognition of the limitations of existing practices, the opportunities for more efficient use of resources, and more effective fulfilment of mandates through the application of modern management tools. In addition, many United Nations agencies, funds and programmes have been experiencing a downward trend in their core-funding situation, while their mandates and activities have continued to expand. Against this background, the measures undertaken to improve management practices have been a vital source of productivity enhancements without which the organizations could not have fulfilled the mandates of Member States.

3. The present report provides a snapshot of initiatives for management improvements being pursued both within the United Nations itself and in the organizations of the common system. The report is divided into three sections. The first section sets out management measures and tools in various areas that are in different stages of development in the system, and illustrates the progress and the resulting impact being achieved in these areas. The second section focuses on current efforts for cooperation, sharing of knowledge and experiences and adoption of optimal practices throughout the system. The third section presents a strategy for expanding cooperation in management improvement measures within the United Nations system.

I. Management improvement measures in the United Nations common system

4. This section presents an illustrative sample of measures taken by entities of the United Nations common system in the principal categories of management improvement: enhancement of monitoring capacity and performance measurement; leveraging technology; streamlining rules, processes and procedures; strengthening common services; improving human resources management; strengthening financial management; and enhancing accountability and delegation. The measures are examples of current good practices that lend themselves to learning and sharing of experience, with a view to appropriate adaptation by organizations to their own needs and circumstances.

Enhancing monitoring capacity and measuring performance in management

5. The concept of performance measurement through integrated monitoring mechanisms is a widely recognized modern management tool. Many national Governments have adopted such mechanisms in their monitoring and management functions to ensure that resources are used effectively at a time when public sector funding is under increasing scrutiny. Several agencies, funds and programmes within the global secretariat have been actively engaged in introducing monitoring tools, based on performance indicators, in order to improve the management of resources in both programmatic and management areas. Within the United Nations the most notable are: (a) the Key Item Management Reporting System and the Galaxy automated recruitment, placement and promotion system in the Department of Management; (b) the Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs; (c) the Programme Monitoring System in the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP); (d) the Programme and Financial Management Information System in the Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention; and (e) the Work Plans and Implementation Tracking System in the Office of Internal Oversight Services; (f) similarly, as of the biennium 2002-2003, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has introduced an integrated management information system to support results-based programming and budgeting: two components have already been deployed — the system of information on Strategies, Tasks and Evaluation of Results (SISTER), and the Finance and Budget System (FABS). A third component, covering human resources management, is planned for 2004-2005. The common aim of these systems is to provide senior managers with an overview of the status of activities and resources so as to enable them to track and take action on key management issues. All of these systems use web-based technology and provide real-time information to support the identification of emerging problems which may need attention and/or corrective action.

Leveraging technology for modernization and improvement of management efficiency

6. The rapid advancement of information technology (IT) continues to offer opportunities for organizations to streamline business processes and to create integrated electronic platforms in support of organizational structures. The United Nations organizations have a promising opportunity to reap the benefits of such innovations.

7. The first phase of efforts to introduce information technology to United Nations organizations largely consisted of initiatives to convert manual paper-based processes to an electronic format, with the result being that practically all key information is now available digitally. At the same time, the United Nations workforce over the past decade has significantly increased its level of technological aptitude: as a consequence, new IT applications can now be introduced with a minimum of marginal cost in terms of staff training, for example, by using online learning to complement face-to-face training. With these conditions in place, the stage has been set for the launch of a new generation of technologies that will enhance productivity and cost-efficiency.

8. A host of new IT initiatives are currently under way across the United Nations system in terms of benefiting from current technological opportunities. Noteworthy examples include: (a) the introduction by the United Nations Office of Legal Affairs of electronic document publishing and handling systems to support the production and dissemination of the United Nations *Treaty Series*: these systems have contributed to a quadrupling of production and to the projected elimination by 2003 of an 11-year backlog of treaty publications; (b) the deployment by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) of a virtual private network (VPN) which will link decentralized offices to all of the local network services available at headquarters; (c) the creation by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) of ICAO-NET, an online system providing access for 130 Member States to electronic archives; (d) the creation by UNESCO of a comprehensive online database containing official documents and educational, scientific and cultural publications available to Member States and the general public; (e) the development by the Department of Public Information of an in-house capability to provide live webcasts of meetings and events at Headquarters; the use of this in-house capability for the special session on Habitat saved the organization $30,000; (f) the implementation of a client profile system in OIOS, which provides oversight staff with up-to-date information on the status of implementation of oversight recommendations; (g) the introduction by ESCAP of an online staff leave management system and an electronic workflow system to manage the editing and production of official documents; (h) the launching of a similar system in the United Nations Office at Vienna for production of conference documents also provides for monitoring of staff productivity: (i) the use of electronic correspondence management systems in the Department of Political Affairs and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights which use digital imaging technology to scan incoming paper documents and distribute them electronically to the appropriate staff; (j) the implementation by the United Nations Office at Geneva of an automated diagnostic accounting system to improve the accuracy and productivity of financial transaction processing, and a telecommunications system that automatically routes calls via one of a set of service providers depending on which is the lowest cost at that time; (k) the creation by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of an official travel database that provides information on planned travel, mission reports and other administrative information to all programme managers; (l) the development by the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services of an Interpreter Assignment Programme to automate the scheduling and assignment of interpreters to conferences and meetings, and a computerized stock control system to track the inventory of documents in its distribution system; and (m) the introduction by the Department of Management of an electronic Performance Appraisal System which provides online access to supporting documentation and remote access via the Internet.

9. Taken together, these measures reflect the shift towards a more advanced series of IT applications in public sector management. A conscious policy in favour of such measures in the form of major investment will provide long-term dividends to Member States in the form of enhanced services and of economies of scale through amortization of the existing infrastructure investments.

Streamlining rules, processes and procedures

10. One of the major obstacles to efficient management in large organizations is the tendency for rules and regulations to proliferate and for processes to become unnecessarily intricate. The United Nations is no exception to this phenomenon. Even as mandates have continued to become more numerous and complex, organizations across the United Nations system have taken a proactive approach to overcoming bottlenecks through process re-engineering, the reduction of administrative layers and the elimination of redundant rules and regulations.

11. A critical reform which aimed to streamline the administrative rules of the United Nations has been implemented. As a result of that reform, a more effective system of administrative rules has been created. In particular, 460 documents have been abolished, or have been allowed to expire (92 Secretary-General's bulletins, 86 administrative instructions, 224 information circulars and 58 personnel directives (see ST/SGB/1997/1 and A/C.5/56/3)).

12. Other important initiatives in this area include the following: (a) the Department of Peacekeeping Operations has established a set of system contracts with vendors to deliver standard equipment and supplies for field missions at agreed prices for a determined period, thereby streamlining the acquisition process and ensuring low prices. It has also piloted a shortened process of checking into and out of peacekeeping missions, so that a 19-day processing time has been reduced to 2 days; (b) the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has undertaken a major initiative to enhance administrative support for humanitarian field operations through the streamlining of procedures and mechanisms, including the development of special procedures for use in emergencies; (c) the Department of Management has introduced a new recruitment system which aims to reduce the time needed to fill vacancies from 275 to a maximum of 120 days. It has created an electronic handbook of staff regulations and rules and an Intranet-based system which reduces the number of steps for processing of staff lump-sum reimbursement requests, as well as a Requisition Tracking System to allow requesting offices to enquire online about the status of their procurement orders. It has eliminated over 900 administrative and regulatory documents and has piloted a system to streamline the processing of travel claims within 14 days; (d) the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has re-engineered processes at its Copenhagen warehouse, resulting in shorter cycle times and a reduction of inventory costs from $35 million to $22 million and a $1.4 million reduction in staff costs; (e) UNESCO has put in place a new Finance and Budget System to rationalize workflow and reduce paperwork, while providing instant access to management information and helping to streamline administrative procedures; and (f) the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has introduced a corporate memorandum of understanding (MOU) database system, which maintains records of agreements with other organizations and monitors the status of their implementation.

Strengthening common services

13. One means by which the organizations of the United Nations system provide Member States with value greater than the sum of its parts is by the consolidation of overhead activities into a unified common services framework, thereby enhancing standardization and realizing economies of scale. Organizations are actively working to expand this approach by means of a range of coordinated initiatives.

14. Common services measures being undertaken through joint efforts include: (a) the establishment of United Nations Houses in 46 field duty stations (as of the end of 2001), which contributes to savings in overhead costs and to enhanced coordination through day-to-day interactions; (b) a Department of Management initiative to secure a global contract for shipment of staff personal effects; (c) a joint project to fully digitize all archived core records and correspondence of the Secretariat and the funds/programmes; (d) the harmonization of payment of staff entitlements between the United Nations Secretariat and the funds/programmes pertaining to daily subsistence allowance, travel and home leave; (e) the Lead Agency Procurement Approach, coordinated by the Office of Central Support Services, which provides for agencies with operational expertise in a specific procurement area to lead procurement on behalf of other United Nations organizations; and (f) an Office of Central Support Services arrangement to provide a shared data connection from IMIS to travel agencies to avoid manual entry of information and to streamline the processing of transactions.

Improving human resources management

15. Human resources constitute the single most important asset of the organizations of the common system. A motivated and well-trained staff is central to the success of any qualitative improvement of management practices. To this end, there has been a concerted effort by United Nations organizations to implement a variety of measures to improve all aspects of staff management. Within the United Nations Secretariat, the adoption of a comprehensive human resources management reform strategy has included the development of a new integrated recruitment, placement, promotion and mobility system, strengthening of performance management, the use of competencies, enhanced staff development and career support programmes, increased attention to work/life issues and new tools for monitoring and for performance appraisal; management training has changed from a focus on individual development to one which emphasizes organizational development. Other examples of initiatives to improve human resource management include: (a) the Department of Political Affairs has initiated an induction and mentoring programme to facilitate the integration of new staff into the department, which provides for on-the-job training and mentoring; (b) the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has developed a programme to promote rotation and mobility of staff across functions and duty stations, in order to improve career development opportunities; (c) OHCHR has implemented a staff survey designed to capture perceptions and opinions about quality of services by offices, along with a 360-degree feedback mechanism; similarly ESCAP has conducted a client satisfaction survey to assess the level of staff satisfaction with the services provided by the administration — the feedback is being incorporated under managers' work plans for the next PAS cycle; (d) UNESCO has embarked on the implementation of a new Human Resources Policy Framework, including annual recruitment plans with electronic management of candidates, streamlined promotion and rotation policies, enhanced family benefits and appropriate staff management consultation mechanisms; (e) the United Nations Office at Geneva has restructured its recruitment and personnel functions in order to streamline work distribution and workflow, including the establishment of a rapid response team to provide human resource services for humanitarian and emergency field activities; (f) the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) has implemented a new performance appraisal programme based on objectives and competencies, and has introduced a

system of additional within-grade salary increments for staff who are laterally transferred between posts, with the objective of promoting career mobility; (g) the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) new staff placement and promotion system has eliminated the time-consuming annual promotion review of all staff. The system is vacancy-driven, with successful candidates being promoted on the basis of reduced seniority requirements; (h) the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) has introduced a system whereby vacant posts are filled on an interim basis by existing staff awaiting assignment instead of through the recruitment of external temporary assistance, a measure which has resulted in greater internal mobility of staff; (i) FAO and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have developed telecommuting policies to allow for greater flexibility in working hours, location and leave policy, so as to promote a family-friendly work environment.

Strengthening financial management

16. A major change is taking place among United Nations organizations away from traditional budget and financial systems in which activity was driven by inputs, to a results-based budgeting approach which identifies from the desired outcomes and then derives the budget requirements necessary to achieve those outcomes. Such a change strengthens managerial accountability by focusing on results at all phases of the budget process, and presents a clearer picture of the desired changes and benefits resulting from programmes. At the same time, organizations are discovering new ways of generating revenue and recovering costs, of standardizing financial statements and streamlining cash management.

17. Examples of such measures include: (a) the ongoing application of results-based budgeting within the United Nations Secretariat. The first programme budget incorporating a results-based budgeting logical framework has been approved by the General Assembly, and training of staff in results-based budgeting methodologies is scheduled for completion in August 2002; (b) as of the biennium 2002-2003, results-based programming and budgeting in UNESCO is supported by a new integral management information system, covering in particular financial transactions and accounts; (c) the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) has also introduced results-based budgeting for the 2002-2003 biennium. In approving the budget, the WMO Executive Council recognized that a single planning and budgeting process linked with the performance measurement and reporting system would help WMO to achieve coherent programme planning and enhance accountability; (d) the establishment of an investment pooling system by the Department of Management to increase interest income, reduce bank fees and obtain more advanced banking services. Since the system was implemented in 2000 for accounts denominated in United States dollars, the rate of return has increased by more than 35 basis points; (e) the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has consolidated all its financial information from Headquarters and the field into a single Financial Accounting System which provides timely information and reports to staff, management and donors; (f) the United Nations Office at Geneva has introduced a Consolidated Treasury System to automate the processing of IMIS disbursement. By eliminating manual re-entry and automating reconciliation, this system allows users to reconcile accounts daily instead of monthly.

Enhancing accountability and delegation

18. A unifying element among the various United Nations management improvement initiatives has been an increased focus on the tangible results of the work of organizations. A vital factor in translating this results orientation into operational terms has been the delegation and decentralization of authority to programme managers and field offices to take initiatives in pursuit of improved outcomes. This approach has been accompanied by a corresponding strengthening of systems to ensure that managers are held accountable for their results and that increased responsibilities are used properly.

19. Illustrative initiatives in this area include: (a) the Secretariat's introduction of Performance Measurement Plans, under which senior managers undertake a compact with the Secretary-General to accomplish measurable objectives in their areas of responsibility. The results achieved under the compacts are reviewed and assessed by the Secretary-General on an annual basis; (b) the establishment of an accountability panel chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General to review and take action on monitoring reports and oversight recommendations in areas relating to managerial accountability; (c) delegation by ODCCP to directors of certifying authority over allotments issued to their divisions for regular budget, support budget and project authority; (d) UNESCO's development of a matrix for delegation of authority to its decentralized network, covering representation, programme planning and implementation, human and financial resources management and fund-raising; in addition to the recently created Office of Internal Oversight Services, an Oversight Committee has been established comprising top management and invited experts; (e) decentralization by the World Food Programme (WFP) of its regional offices out of headquarters and strengthening of local procurement and field-based human resources management. These processes have been accompanied by an upgrading of audit and oversight systems, including the development of a risk-assessment instrument enabling auditors to visit lower-risk country offices less often than high-risk offices; (f) increased requirements of the United Nations Office at Geneva for direct involvement of responsible departments in defending legal appeals or administrative actions; (g) ESCAP's strengthening of its programme monitoring and evaluation capacity through the training of staff in the use of logical frameworks and performance indicators; and (h) establishment by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) of an Office of Internal Oversight Services, integrating programme evaluation, audit, management services and investigation.

20. The different areas surveyed in this section provide an overview of management improvements across the United Nations system. The following section examines specific mechanisms by which such practices are shared. It is important to recognize that the nature and substance of the management improvement activities reported in documents such as the current report also promote the process of learning and transfer of best practices across duty stations and organizations. The measures taken to create an electronic United Nations have shifted data into digital formats, allowing for wider automated sharing and integration of information at the level of the United Nations system. The ongoing streamlining of rules, processes and procedures is making the funds, programmes and agencies more user-friendly to each other and to outside counterparts. The strengthening of common services embodies the sharing of best practices through the establishment of joint arrangements for the handling of common overhead tasks. The improvement of staff management, including through increased mobility and enhanced training, has

created a more flexible corps of personnel that can more easily work with counterparts across organizational boundaries. Finally, increased delegation and decentralization have placed increasing authority in the hands of line managers at the operational level, who are most likely to see benefits in sharing knowledge and practices with their counterparts from other agencies. At the same time, the enhancement of oversight mechanisms has made organizational processes increasingly transparent, and thus more suitable for sharing across institutional boundaries. In short, the dynamics of management improvement and knowledge sharing are mutually reinforcing: management improvements create conditions that facilitate knowledge-sharing, and enhanced knowledge-sharing transmits practices which in turn lead to management improvements.

II. Efforts for cooperation, learning and sharing of experience within the United Nations common system

21. As organizations across the United Nations system have implemented management improvement measures, there has been a growing realization of the importance of mechanisms to promote harmonization and cross-application of such initiatives. In response to this realization, cooperative frameworks have emerged to provide an infrastructure for a systematic and sustainable exchange of learning and good practices among the organizations.

United Nations Secretariat

22. As part of the Secretary-General's programme to strengthen the Organization, a number of initiatives have been taken to ensure a more integrated approach to broad management issues across the global Secretariat. Chief among these was the establishment of the Senior Management Group, chaired by the Secretary-General, which provides a platform for information sharing and policy harmonization on programmatic and management issues at the highest level of the Organization (see ST/SGB/1997/3). Similarly, the Steering Committee on Reform and Management, chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General and composed of heads of departments/offices, acts as a clearing house for adoption of optimal practices.

23. Within the Department of Management, a Management Policy Committee has been established, composed of the Under-Secretary-General for Management, the Assistant Secretaries-General responsible for budget and finance, common services and human resources, as well as the Director of the Management Policy Office. The Committee meets weekly to discuss strategic and policy issues affecting the work of the Department and its counterpart offices across the global Secretariat.

24. A task team, composed of senior officers from the main areas of the Department, has been created within that framework to serve as a clearing-house mechanism for the dissemination of information on management practice across the Secretariat in the various fields of management (human resources, finance, accounts, programme planning, budget, procurement, information and communications technologies). The team will also ensure the sharing of optimal management practices and "best in class" approaches from Headquarters to the field.

25. Also in the Department of Management, a pilot project has been developed to create an online capacity to store data on management improvement measures and

reform activities, analyse their progress, and prepare impact assessment reports for the senior managers of the Organization. The project is being designed to proactively bring information on new initiatives, including both the successes, impacts and difficulties of the applications to the attention of the Steering Committee on Reform and Management. The adoption of a systematic, indicator-based reporting process will help to assess the outcomes of administrative measures for improvement within the Secretariat. Another project, the Productivity Knowledge Gateway, tracks individual and team-based initiatives which lead to increases in productivity. Similarly, the Common Services Working Group and the Information Technology Support Board provide coordination mechanisms within the United Nations Secretariat to ensure that common approaches and strategies are followed in these two areas of work to implement the Secretary-General's reform initiatives.

United Nations common system

26. Management harmonization at the level of the United Nations common system falls under the aegis of the Chief Executives Board (CEB), the forum that brings together the executive heads of all organizations of the United Nations system to further coordination and cooperation on the full range of substantive and management issues facing the common system. Chaired by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Board meets twice a year, and is assisted on management issues by the High Level Committee on Management (HLCM).

27. HLCM was formally established in October 2000, to identify and analyse management issues of common concern that require a system-wide response. The Committee acts in the name of the CEB on matters affecting the administrative management of all member organizations of the United Nations system. It is authorized to take decisions on behalf of executive heads, and to promote and coordinate reforms that will improve services, improve productivity and increase effectiveness across the United Nations system. HLCM is also responsible for:

(a) Ensuring the sharing of knowledge and experiences in order to enable organizations to profit from best practices;

(b) Facilitating continuing dialogue on the reform processes and the management of change under way in the organizations of the system;

(c) Introducing measurable improvements and other administrative reforms;

(d) Analysing areas requiring system-wide inter-agency collaboration and using mechanisms such as networks to achieve such collaboration, while keeping permanent bodies to a minimum.

28. Furthermore, the Secretary-General and his colleagues in the CEB have established a number of inter-agency coordinating mechanisms as part of a programme of management reforms. These include the Human Resources Network, the Information and Communications Technologies Coordinators Group, the Budget and Finance Network, the Inter-Agency Network of Facilities Managers, and the Inter-Agency Security Networking Group. These networks have contributed to the development of system-wide initiatives for change, standardization of nomenclatures and operating procedures, and have launched a number of joint projects. For example, the Human Resources Network has been responsible for introducing competencies and competency-based performance management in the

organizations, as well as supporting the harmonization of personnel practices; it is also working closely with the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) to develop an improved pay and benefits system. HLCM maintains an online site on management issues at http://ceb.unsystem.org/hlcm/.

Operational measures

29. Within the cooperative frameworks described above, specific initiatives are under way to promote sharing of experience and tools between the different duty stations and between organizations. The following initiatives are examples of such cooperation: (a) the United Nations Office at Vienna has adopted the Interpreter Assignment Programme originally developed by the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services to automate the scheduling and assignment of interpreters to conferences and meetings; (b) the United Nations Office at Nairobi has applied the Document Control and Performance Monitoring System created by the United Nations Office at Vienna to provide for online management of the document creation process; (c) the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has developed the ReliefWeb site to consolidate and organize information on humanitarian operations, including sharing of logistical and financial information for humanitarian and field operations, and has sponsored a major symposium on best practices in humanitarian information exchange; (d) UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF have made a major stride towards administrative coordination by adopting a single harmonized budget mechanism and format. The harmonization of budget processes has provided a higher degree of user-friendliness, has supported fact-based decision processes and has allowed for easier comparison of information across organizations; and (e) the creation of the United Nations Staff College has provided a centralized source of training through which staff from different agencies will be able to develop a shared base of common knowledge and values in programme, management and leadership functions.

Potential areas for improvements through enhanced cooperation

30. While these activities have been successful, there is still considerable scope for improvement. With respect to activities in the area of crisis prevention, mitigation and management, for example, significant scope exists for coordination and consolidation of overhead costs among field-oriented organizations such as UNHCR, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, WFP, UNICEF and UNDP. Efforts are under way for the development of more cohesive practices among these organizations, such as the decentralization of elements of logistical infrastructure to regional centres, increased harmonization of operating procedures, and adoption of standard turn-around times for delivery of humanitarian supplies and services. Work is also under way to assess the feasibility of a system-wide search facility for online public information.

31. In the area of information technology, United Nations agencies' systems tend to be less integrated than is the case among many private sector organizations. For example, most United Nations organizations do not offer each other access to their Intranets and e-mail directories; such shared access would greatly facilitate day-to-day interaction and coordination. In addition, most back-office information systems are not interoperable with those of their sister organizations; transactions between members of the United Nations system are often as complex as those with outside organizations. Along similar lines, a number of digital document management

systems have been introduced in different parts of the United Nations system, but they have not yet been integrated into a single universally searchable archive which offers global access to documents.

32. These examples show the potential for management improvement that remains to be realized through enhanced cooperation, learning and comparison of experiences. The challenge facing the United Nations common system today is to develop a framework that will continue to harness this potential.

III. A strategy for cooperation and coordination in management improvement measures

Need for an integrated strategy

33. The management improvement measures being undertaken by the United Nations organizations vary greatly in their methods and approaches, due to the complexities and specificities of their respective missions, capacities and needs. But, while such a variety of practices can be a hindrance to short-term harmonization of operations, this variety also benefits the common system in the longer term by providing an array of options from which best-in-class approaches can be selected, adopted and replicated across other organizations.

34. As the United Nations organizations seek to realize the potential benefits of greater cooperation, learning and comparison of experience, the need for an integrated and proactive strategy for managing such coordination at the system level has become apparent. The strategy presented here responds to this need by transforming the coordination process from an ad hoc, passive clearing-house model to one that is capable of actively driving the process of sharing of best practices. This strategy seeks to institutionalize the change management process at the level of the common system by creating a self-generating production line for the purpose of analysing, adopting and promoting best practices.

Standard management practices

35. An essential element of the strategy is the ongoing review of reform initiatives in the various management areas by HLCM. The HLCM secretariat will continue to be responsible for undertaking a systematic process of studying and analysing the evolution of the different approaches applied by the United Nations organizations across similar subject areas. When experiments or improvements in a given area have produced concrete benefits, the secretariat will present those results to HLCM, together with an assessment of impacts. HLCM will assess the relative merits of the various options and their suitability for replication as a standard across the common system and across duty stations. Practices that are judged to have the highest suitability will be promulgated as official standard management practices for the system.

36. The adoption of these practices could be encouraged through a system of incentives. For example, they could include the negotiation of system-wide contracts on favourable terms with vendors to provide services in support of standard practices; or arrangements for a roster system to promote the exchange and/or secondment of staff with expertise in specific areas for the benefit of organizations that are implementing new practices for the first time. Further support for standard

management practices could derive from their inclusion in the Staff College curriculum.

Information management

37. Management improvements within the United Nations system to date have been driven by a bottom-up dynamic, with individual offices taking initiatives to improve the quality and increase the timeliness of their work. Taking into account this reality on the ground, the definition of a practical approach to adoption of good practices must include a systematic capacity for capturing and integrating information about the array of management improvements and administrative reform initiatives in train throughout the system. Such a capacity will take the form of an online knowledge-sharing forum to focus, discuss and share information from across the United Nations system on progress with and the results of various management improvement efforts. This forum would allow organizations to share frank discussions about their management initiatives, and would be made available as a tool for organizations for internal tracking purposes.

38. In order for HLCM to fulfil its role within the overall strategy, it will require a capability for aggregating and analysing information about management improvements that are occurring at the level of the United Nations system, and for assessing their impact. The planned data warehouse will provide an infrastructure that is well suited to this purpose. The technical application of the proposed system may take several forms. One approach is for its capabilities to be shared with agencies, funds and programmes across the system via a web interface. In this manner, it would provide a management improvement information service directly to common system organizations. It could also be configured to receive and aggregate information directly from mechanisms and networks that HLCM has set up to track, monitor and share management improvement processes in the common system.

39. The presence of such a capability would provide HLCM with a strategic overview of information on system-wide management improvements. With this information at its disposal, HLCM would be in a position to compare the efforts of United Nations organizations in the common system on a cross-cutting basis, to identify "best in class" management improvements suitable for benchmarking as United Nations standard management practices, and to track their impact across the system at large.

IV. Conclusion

40. The management improvement measures taking place across the organizations of the United Nations common system are part of a broader process of reform; they are more evident in some organizations than in others and the degree of success of such measures often reflects whether a broader change in the management "culture" is under way. It is clear that there are few standard templates which fit the needs of all organizations. The CEB has put in place networking mechanisms in specific areas which facilitate the sharing of good management practices, reform initiatives and productivity measures: the sharing of experience and information helps to identify areas for common initiatives by groups of organizations or across duty stations. Of particular importance is the need for good management practices to be

shared between headquarters locations and field duty stations. Wherever possible, standard practices and common service platforms offer opportunities for pooling of resources and reduction of duplication of effort.

41. **The General Assembly may wish to take note of work in progress across the organizations of the United Nations common system to promote cooperation, learning and sharing of experience with regard to management improvement measures.**